

# Sir Keith Park Memorial Airfield Inc.

Newsletter – October 2023 - #9



## SKPMA Inc. – Officers

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## This Issue:

- What has happened recently; and
- What have we/I learnt from all this!

## Thames Battle of Britain Commemorations:

### ***THIS YEAR:***

Held this year Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> September at the Thames Airfield, a date chosen to avoid a clash with other main-centre commemorations.

Some last-minute consternation and replanning, as rain persisted requiring the main service to be moved into the Hauraki Aero Club hangar. Despite my early reservations, there were many pluses from being inside. The event went well and it was wonderful to have a substantial contingent from the #37 Thames ATC. Unfortunately, a number of cadets succumbed to standing through the service, fainting on the spot! Wonderful to have the Kerepehi Brass Band playing for us again.

Attendance was over one hundred, speakers being; Russell Skeet as MC, Mayor Len Salt, myself as the President of SKPMA Inc., Hon Scott Simpson, BAF Lt. Col. Stewart Dines (UK Defence Advisor to New Zealand), and RNZAF Wg Cdr Mike Cannon (Base Commander, Auckland [Whenuapai]).

A casualty was a promised fly over by the RNZAF Black Falcons, who got as close as Paeroa/Ngatea but were forced to return to Hamilton because on the inclement weather.



### ***NEXT YEAR:***

The service next year will be held on Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> September 2024 at the Thames Airfield.

This is also planned as the inauguration of Joanne Sullivan's 2.3m bronze statue of Air Chief Marshal Sir Keith Park, which will complement the Stage 1 Hurricane Fighter (in Sir Keith's personalised Battle of Britain colours and completed in 2020).

An invitation has been sent to King Charles III to conduct the unveiling when he visits New Zealand next year, but more on that below.

## **My Visit to UK and Malta:**

### ***MALTA:***

I was invited to participate in two RAF Memorial Services in Malta 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> September – a great personal honour and a recognition of what our project is working to achieve. The first service was at the Ta' Qali Aviation Museum for the unveiling of a memorial to those who have served in Malta from Royal Air Force from 1918 to 1979 and who served with the Royal Air Force (Malta) within 1949 to 1979. This was honoured by a ten-aircraft flyover by the RAF Red Arrows who were in Malta for the Malta Air Show 23<sup>rd</sup>/24<sup>th</sup> September.

I gave the keynote address at the second Memorial Service held at the Malta Memorial, speaking about ACM Sir Keith Park and our project.

VIPs at these services included;

- Air Marshal Sir Baz North, President of the Royal Air Forces Association;
- Her Excellency Ms Katherine Ward, British High Commissioner;
- Mr Kevin Bonnici, Honorary New Zealand Consul to Malta;
- Dr Jo Etienne Abela Rt. Hon. Minister, Maltese Government;
- Lt. Col. Nicholas Greech, Commanding Officer of the Air Forces Malta Air Wing;
- Sqn. Ldr. M A Micallef-Eynaud, President of RAFA Malta Branch;
- Wg. Cdr. Mark Waters (New Zealand Air Advisor UK, Defence Attaché Ireland, Defence Attaché Italy);
- Australian Defence Attaché to Malta;
- Mr Reg Fitzgerald, RAFA Event Organiser;
- Officers and Members of the RAFA Malta Branch;



I travelled to UK and Malta with my wife – Prue – and we were accompanied in Malta by Lesley Park (great niece of Sir Keith) and her daughter and son-in-law.

On one day in the capital – Valette – we visited the Lascaris War Tunnels which house ACM Sir Keith's command and control centre, from which he directed the successful defence of Malta 1942/43.

We were disappointed that on Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> the Malta International Air Show was cancelled due to high winds. Representatives from the air forces of fourteen countries were destined to participate.

### ***ENGLAND:***

In our time before and after Malta, I was able to visit a number of RAF facilities and related in England. These were:

- Tangmere (one of the Group 11 stations in World War 2), where ACM Sir Keith was station commander before the Battle of Britain. I have visited Tangmere on a number of occasions, and have excellent relationships with the RAF Museum management there;
- Biggin Hill (one of the Group 11 stations in the Battle of Britain), where there is another Battle of Britain museum. To me the highlight was the delightful and moving chapel dedicated to RAF personnel in World War 2;
- RAF Club, Piccadilly, London, to which I had a letter of introduction. An amazing institution with lots of pomp and ceremony;
- Meeting with the New Zealand High Commissioner to the UK, His Excellency Phil Goff. He was most hospitable and we had a convivial meeting. He is a great supporter of our project and the need to promote ACM Sir Keith, and his war and peace time achievements.

The key objective of this visit was to present two letters to him: one from ex-TCDC Mayor – Sandra Goudie, and one from current Mayor – Len Salt, inviting King Charles III to Thames for the inauguration of our statue next September! I am aware (confidentially) that Phil has written a strong letter of support, which has been sent to the Private Secretary to His Majesty King Charles III (a fellow Kiwi).

### ***Watch this space . . . !!***

My overall impression from each of these visits, and including the Lascaris War Tunnels in Malta, was the almost complete lack of recognition of ACM Sir Keith Park!

Defender of London, Defender of Malta . . .

**There is more work to be done . . . !!**

## **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING:**

The first attempt at holding the SKPMA Inc. Annual General Meeting had to be abandoned through lack of a quorum. We barely had a quorum on the second attempt on Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> September.

The proceedings went without issue including the passing of the Annual Accounts for 2022/23.

## **MEDIA COVERAGE & RELATED:**

We have recently received good media coverage in some areas.

Articles in the Valley Profile (two: Battle of Britain and Malta), The Mercury Bay Informer in their Spring glossy magazine, and the Air Force News have been posted on our website.

For the third year running, I have been unable establish contact with, or to get any coverage from TV1, Seven Sharp or the NZHerald.

**Work to be done . . . !!**

I am also working with content providers to the Ministry of Education to publish one or more fliers featuring ACM Sir Keith Park and his war and peace time achievements, emphasising his legacy as an aspirational role model.

## **FUND-RAISING:**

We received a successful grant application from Pub Charity (their second contribution to our project) of \$24,000 on 4<sup>th</sup> August. This enabled two significant milestone payments to be made to Joanne Sullivan towards the completion of the statue.

We still need in the order of \$100,000 in the next two months to enable the statue to be sent to the foundry and completed.

There are two significant grant applications (Lotto and CreativeNZ) quietly hatching, the latter will not be announced for three months.

We also have an annuity from Ryman Healthcare of \$5,000 (2020), inflation adjusted and in perpetuity. This year's invoicing is \$5,878 so a useful contribution to our overheads.

Sadly, there are a significant number of annual membership subscriptions to the Sir Keith Park Memorial Airfield Inc. (the organisation developing the Sir Keith Park Memorial) that are outstanding. If you haven't done so, please do so as soon as possible!

## **WHAT HAVE I LEARNT:**

As the project has progressed, I have come to see that Sir Keith's greatest and real legacy relates to his characteristics of leadership, integrity, commitment to the task at hand at whatever personal cost, and yet humility.

This legacy makes him an aspirational role model to all young New Zealanders – and many others.

**Our memorial will be iconic. Let us ensure that this is so.**

On one of my recent flights, I watched the movie – “The Lost King”, the story of amateur archaeologist, Philippa Langley, on a journey to discover and exhume the body of King Richard III in 2012, who had been buried in a Leicester car park.

For years, historians and academics had searched for his final resting place following his death in 1485 in the Battle of Bosworth Field. Some believed his tomb was lost, while others were convinced he was tossed into the nearby River Soar. But Philippa Langley, an amateur historian living in Edinburgh, followed research and instinct to uncover his long-lost bones.

I encourage you to watch this movie. A movie which, in many ways, mirrors my own journey of discovery about ACM Sir Keith Park in this project.

## **NEXT STEPS:**

- Fund-raising;
- Fund-raising;
- Fund-raising;
- Greater media and general coverage in support of this very significant memorial project. Please spread the word!!

Geoff Ferkert

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